World Conference against Racism and Xenophobia

*348. SHRI RAJU PARMAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) who is going to represent Government side at the World Conference against racism and xenophobia to be held at Durban;

(b) how many non-official representatives would be sent to the Conference;

(c) whether it is a fact that a number of individuals and organisations belonging to Dalit Communities have requested Government to allow discussion regarding discrimination on the basis of castes in India; and

(d) if so, what action is proposed in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (d) The composition of the delegation to represent India at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, scheduled to be held in Durban, South Africa from August 31st—September 7th, 2001 is being finalised.

A National Committee had been set up by the Prime Minister on December 16, 2000, under the Chairmanship of the Minister of External Affairs to aid India's participation in the World Conference. This Committee has assisted in ensuring that a wider nationwide discussion and preparation be enabled; also that India's participation in the conference is meaningful, constructive and in consonance with our national policies.

The National Committee has, so far, held two sessions—in New Delhi in February 2001 and at Hyderabad in June 2001. At its Hyderabad session, the Committee heard presentations by around fifty NGOs. We are inspired and guided by the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar and other social reformers on issues relating to caste discrimination. Several NGOs expressed the view that while there were constitutional and legal safeguards against discrimination on the basis of caste, and that whereas Government had initiated affirmative action programmes, discrimination continues to exist at the social level.

The National Committee has deliberated on these presentations and other relevant material, too. It has concluded that while there was need to strengthen the national structures and institutions to ensure a more effective implementation of the constitutional and legislative provisions, also our affirmative action programmes, this was not a matter for any international intitiative or intervention. They have, therefore, advised that it would not be appropriate to include this issue on the Agenda of the Conference. The Government intends to act accordingly.